

Westlaw.

The New York Times

4/30/06 NYT 646

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4/30/06 N.Y. Times 646
2006 WLNR 7370479

New York Times (NY)

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April 30, 2006

Section: 6

Ministering To the Upwardly Mobile Muslim

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Early one gray Friday morning in late December, Mona K. left her parents' house in a residential neighborhood in Alexandria, Egypt, and headed downtown to Al Amirat, a wedding hall facing the Mediterranean Sea. She was going to see Amr Khaled, a Muslim TV preacher. Khaled's devotional programs are broadcast on Iqraa, a Saudi-owned religious satellite channel, and together with millions of other mostly young Muslims in the Middle East and Europe, Mona is a loyal viewer.

I traveled with Khaled in Egypt, England and Germany last winter, listening to him speak to large crowds and small groups. Many of his followers had stories much like Mona's. Her family, as she was growing up, was traditional -- she prayed fairly regularly, and she always fasted during Ramadan -- but not extremely religious. She had been listening to Khaled's sermons and watching him on television since a friend took her to one of his talks when she was a teenager. She was blown away. Khaled was different from any religious speaker she had ever heard. He wasn't an imam; in fact, he didn't have any official religious credentials at all. He was young, just 38, and like Mona he'd had a secular education. He had worked as an accountant for Cairo's most prestigious firm. On TV, he dressed in stylish European suits or jaunty sweaters and polo shirts -- no long robes -- and he spoke not in classical Arabic but the way she did, peppering his sermons with Egyptian slang. He told emotional stories about the Prophet Muhammad that often concluded with simple, satisfying morals and a list of practical lessons to apply in the week ahead. He used modern Western terms, saying that Islam "empowers" women and that the Prophet Muhammad was "the first manager" and held "press conferences." Unlike traditional Muslim religious leaders, Khaled didn't parse the finer points of Islamic law or get too deeply into political questions -- he emphasized that he wasn't qualified to speak on either. He talked instead about how to be successful and happy and how to enjoy life while avoiding sin.

On his TV show and in his frequent public appearances, he told his audiences how much Allah loved people, how merciful Allah was and how easy it was to earn his

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forgiveness. Khaled was tall and athletic and masculine, but he had a gentle demeanor, and when he prayed with his audience, he often broke down in tears. Khaled is especially popular among women, who are drawn in part by the fact that he addresses them directly in his sermons and emphasizes their central role in Islam -- he has pointed out that the first convert to Islam and the first martyr to die in jihad were both women. He compares women's bodies to pearls, so precious that they require a thick shell of covering. He once told his followers that when the Prophet's wife Aisha had her menstrual period and was moody, Muhammad always made extra efforts to "display love and compassion."

As she watched and listened to Khaled's sermons, Mona grew more excited about Islam. She began praying more often. She tried fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, which the Koran recommends. Once, Mona wrote a letter to Khaled asking for "Islamic guidance" concerning a personal problem. Khaled receives thousands of letters and phone calls a week from young people asking for his advice on everything from whom to marry to how to pray to what to do if they think they might be gay. "He replied back with the most tender words," Mona recalled when I met her. (She asked that I not use her full name.) "He sent a card, and it said, 'If you want to ask me anything else, consider me like your elder brother!' It wasn't copied and pasted -- he really reads your letters and gives you his thoughts, and he is so tender and most adorable."

When Mona arrived at Al Amirat that morning, a few bubbly young volunteers stood at the entrance with clipboards. One of them checked Mona's name off the list, and then Mona headed upstairs to a ballroom painted maroon and gold and hung with chandeliers. It was crowded; about 250 middle- and upper-class young professionals and university students were milling around. There was a stage at the far end of the room, where men in suits who looked to be management consultants were setting up projection screens for a PowerPoint presentation. None of the men in the room wore traditional beards, which Khaled says are optional -- he himself has no beard at all, just a neatly trimmed mustache. All but one of the women in the room were wearing hijabs, or head scarves, which Khaled says is a requirement of Islam. Some women were fully covered by what amounted to burkas: in addition to robes and head scarves, they were wearing veils that cover the face and eyes, and gloves to cover their hands. Other women had negotiated a compromise between piety and fashion; they wore hijabs trimmed with pink lace around their faces, or they wore them with jeans or electric blue eye shadow.

The young people in the ballroom were the elite of Egypt, educated, often fluent in English, well-off and worldly, but they were from a generation raised during a period of Islamic revival in the country, and many had become more religious than their parents. The women and men had for the most part seated themselves separately; they would divide completely later, when they prayed. From a small booth next to Mona's table, a teenage D.J. was playing the music of Sami Yusuf, a shaggy-haired 25-year-old religious singer from London who performs ballads in a mix of Arabic and English -- songs about his mother, the greater Muslim nation and the importance of wearing the hijab. In Egypt, Khaled has been called, derisively, the Sheik of the Rawshana, a term that roughly translates as "hip" or "misplaced" and refers to that class of Egyptians who feel caught between Western and traditional culture. Khaled offers them an Islam that doesn't require a complete withdrawal from the modern world.

Though Khaled built his ministry in Egypt, he moved with his wife and young son to Birmingham, England, two years ago and began to turn his attention toward a new audience: second-generation Muslims in Europe. He continues to travel and speak in Arab countries, but his viewership now extends as far as Romania and Dublin, and his programs reach millions of viewers each week. His Web site, where followers can chat with one another, download his sermons and purchase hooded sweatshirts branded with the logo of Khaled's organization, received 26 million hits last year, more than Oprah's; it is the third-most-popular Arabic Web site in the world, behind Al Jazeera and an e-mail portal. When Khaled gives lectures in Jordan or Yemen or Germany, he fills stadiums. He is a regular columnist in Arabic women's magazines, and more than five million cassettes of his sermons have been sold in stalls and markets throughout the Middle East. Earlier this year in Egypt, readers of Al Shabab ("Youth") magazine chose him as the second-most-popular figure in the country, after President Hosni Mubarak.

Khaled's unique blend of conservative Islamic belief and Western style has become popular at a moment when governments and scholars from Washington to Cairo are wrestling with the question of whether religious Islam is compatible with democracy and Western culture. The question is perhaps most urgent in Western Europe, where in February a series of cartoons of Muhammad that first appeared in a Danish newspaper sparked worldwide protests, some of which turned violent, even deadly. Muslim scholars and thinkers talk about a dangerous divide within the faith; Khaled Abou El Fadl, a professor at the U.C.L.A. School of Law and the author of a new book on Islam, describes a "fundamental schism" in the religion today between "Puritans" and "moderates."

When you listen to Amr Khaled, it is often hard to tell which side of that split he belongs on. He speaks frequently about the importance of women's rights, but he insists that every woman should wear the hijab. He says that Palestine has been "captured by the disbelievers," by which he means Israeli Jews, but he says that the best way for Muslims to liberate it is not through violence but "to succeed in your studies, to succeed in your life in general and to help others become religious." Khaled's version of Islam may be less exacting than the one promoted by fundamentalists, but like them, he wants an essentially traditional Islam to play a bigger role in people's lives. The path that Mona is on -- toward more religion, more time at prayer, more of the body covered -- is, in Khaled's view, a necessary part of the solution to almost every one of the Middle East's ills.

In effect, Khaled does an end run around the current schism in Islam. As a result, he tends to drive those on either side of the divide a bit nuts. When Khaled organized a reconciliation conference in Denmark in March to try to bridge the gap between Muslims and the West, he was pilloried by conservative religious leaders and newspaper columnists in the Middle East for cozying up to the enemy. But Khaled makes liberals and moderates uneasy too. Wael Lofty, a columnist for Rose al-Youssef, an Egyptian newspaper, says that Khaled's Western touches are just a way to reassure liberals about Islamism and make it palatable to the West. Lofty, who has written a book about Khaled, laments that Khaled attracts educated, largely secular elites and pulls them toward Islamism. When I was in Egypt, I frequently heard rumors that Khaled was secretly allied with the Muslim Brotherhood, the longstanding religious movement that is today the largest opposition political party in the country. Although the Brotherhood's political activities are still largely restricted by the government, its leaders have said

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that if the party should someday win a parliamentary majority, they will govern the world's largest Arab nation according to the principles of Islam. (Khaled says that he currently has no affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood.) In Europe, Islamic intellectuals like Tariq Ramadan, who has called for Muslims in the West to integrate fully into the secular societies in which they live, say that Khaled glosses over the hard questions of contemporary Islam. Fadl told me that he is "unhappy" with Khaled's "lack of critical approach or introspective approach to the tradition."

But Mona and other young people who follow Khaled didn't seem to me to be particularly eager for a critical approach to Islam. More than anything, they were drawn by Khaled's charisma and oratorical style. In the ballroom in Alexandria, I was chatting with Mona at our table when Khaled appeared at the doorway in the middle of a clutch of fans. She stopped speaking midsentence, her eyes fixed on the preacher -- his huge, soulful brown eyes, dark mustache, tailored khaki suit. I started to ask her something, and she shushed me. She grabbed my arm and the arm of the woman sitting next to her and shook us giddily. "See how he is dealing with the child?" she asked me. Khaled was beatifically caressing the face of a young boy, the son of an attendee. "He is such an adorable person!"

Khaled took the stage and grasped a hand-held microphone. I had been with him for several days at this point, and each time he walked onto a stage he delivered the same welcome with the same starry-eyed wonderment, as if he had never stood in front of an audience before. Khaled prepares meticulously before he speaks, rehearsing, asking questions about the acoustics of a room and the feel of the audience. He also writes careful notes for each sermon, though he doesn't use them once he's onstage. He told me that this is so he can look into as many people's eyes as possible.

"Assalamu alaikum," he said humbly, a traditional Muslim greeting. He waited for the applause to die down. "Let me tell you something," he began, speaking in Arabic, and then he paused. He looked around the room slowly, as if overcome with emotion, and said, "You don't know how honored I am to be here."

Khaled didn't set out to be a preacher. He grew up in a traditional household, but not a religious one. One summer while he was in high school in Alexandria, he told me, he was seized by a feeling that the sports and girlfriends and studies that dominated his life were somehow not enough. He began reading the Koran and visiting different mosques. His approach was eclectic: he picked up different ideas and styles he liked from each tradition -- something from the Sufis, a bit from the Wahhabis. Before long, he was talking to everyone around him about religion, and they were listening. He was aided by a photographic memory that seemed to allow him to download Koranic verses straight into his brain.

He majored in accounting at Cairo University, and while he didn't enjoy his studies very much, he did take on various positions in student government and soon found that he had a gift for public speaking. More important, he explained to me, "I discovered that I can make people like me." After he graduated, he worked at the Cairo office of KPMG, the accounting firm, but he was not a very good accountant. (After I traveled with Khaled for three weeks, the fact that he worked as an accountant for a decade began to seem like the most amazing detail of his life. He had trouble keeping track of things. He went missing in airports,

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wandering off to examine sweaters at duty-free shops or to find Boss shirts, his favorites. He told me he "lost" an oversize suitcase with 25 expensive European suits on his way back from Saudi Arabia after Ramadan, and I watched him lose his 4-year-old-son, Aley, in Heathrow Airport during the only 10-minute interval he was responsible for watching him.)

While he was in his 20's, Khaled, like many middle- and upper-class Egyptians, belonged to a shooting club, a sprawling walled complex where members exercised and socialized over frothy drinks made from honeydew melons and watermelons. Khaled's club was the Egyptian Shooting Club in Cairo, which extends for many blocks and counts tens of thousands of families as members. It is not a religious place -- men and women swim in the same pool -- but it has a mosque. One day in 1997, when the mosque's regularly scheduled Friday-afternoon speaker was unavailable, the shooting club's administrator asked Khaled to fill the role. He liked Khaled's talk, about the importance of having good manners, and he soon asked Khaled to speak every week.

As Khaled told me, so many people -- more women than men -- began to attend the shooting club's Friday sermons that soon there wasn't space in the hall for all of them. Khaled was shocked at the influence he seemed to have on his audiences. "When I suggest people do a practical thing," he told me, "they come back and tell me they did it." Well-to-do members of the club invited Khaled to speak in their homes; by age 30, he was hitting as many as three houses a night, every day of the week. He was not getting paid for any of his talks, and, Khaled says, they had a casual, friendly feel; after they were over, he would often play soccer and eat dinner with his audience. The retired singer Yasmeen al-Khayam, daughter of a well-known Koran reciter, Sheik el-Hossari, frequently invited him to speak at her home and later asked Khaled to be the main preacher at her father's mosque.

As his popularity grew, Khaled began to get visits from the Egyptian police; as he pointed out to me, authoritarian regimes are often wary of charismatic leaders with large, young audiences that fill the streets. He says that the police put new conditions on his lectures -- they had to be held on Thursday, for instance, the night couples usually go out -- and that officers sometimes followed him and slashed his tires just to put him in his place. The secret police told him he couldn't preach at Hossari's mosque in Cairo any longer, Khaled says, but instead had to relocate to another one, 20 miles outside the city, that had a broken roof and bad plumbing. This didn't stop buses packed with thousands of young people from arriving every Thursday, not just from Cairo but also from Alexandria and Port Said. Khaled's fans filled the streets and rooftops around the mosque.

Although Evangelical Christian preachers in the United States have for years blended self-help, management-training jargon and religion into a crowd-pleasing performance, it is a new phenomenon in the Muslim world. When I spoke last month to Jon Alterman, director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, he explained to me how Khaled's style is different from what came before. He "doesn't give you chapter and verse on the rules," Alterman said. "He talks about meaning and beauty and fulfillment. While Christian evangelists have done that for more than a century, you haven't really had Muslim evangelists." Khaled stands in stark contrast to the most respected and popular Muslim religious figure on television, Sheik Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who appears on Al Jazeera and is widely considered to be the spiritual leader of the

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Muslim Brotherhood. **Qaradawi**, 79 years old, fully bearded and cloaked in robes, hands down opinions on, for example, whether viewers should or should not join the resistance in Iraq or Palestine.

If you listen to Khaled's sermons, you won't detect any significant theological disagreement with **Qaradawi**. But unlike **Qaradawi**, Khaled doesn't present Muslim law, or Shariah, as something to be imposed by an authority; rather, he says, it is something to be discovered on a journey of personal growth and awareness. Olivier Roy, a leading French scholar of Islam and the author of "Globalized Islam: The Search for the New Ummah," told me that Khaled "has recast the idea of living according to Shariah in different terms for a new generation. He presents it as a matter of values, laws and norms, something much closer to evangelical Christianity in America. It is not about getting your hands cut off if you steal; it's about spiritual achievement."

Like Joel Osteen and T.D. Jakes and other American preachers, Khaled encourages his followers to enjoy material wealth and the physical world while still maintaining a conservative religious life. (Unlike many American televangelists, Khaled doesn't ask for donations from his viewers; most of his income comes from Iqraa. He seems well-off but not superwealthy.) On one of his most famous cassettes, a lecture titled "Youth and the Summer Time," Khaled explains how to go to a beach resort and stay free of sin. "We want you to have a good time during the summer," Khaled advises. "This idea in itself is religious. We do not want you to spend the whole year studying, attending religious lectures, memorizing Koran and guiding your friends without having any fun. Does Islam allow having fun? Yes! The Prophet, all prayers and blessings of Allah be upon him, used to compete in races with his wife Aisha every week. On one occasion, the companions were gathered together, eating watermelon, when they started to throw the seeds at each other and to laugh. Can you imagine the Prophet's companions doing that? . . . We sometimes imagine them as if they were always frowning!"

Khaled is not the only contemporary Muslim preacher to blend Islam with the feel-good optimism of Western management literature. Abdullah Gymnastiar of Indonesia and the Turkish Sufi master Fethullah Gulen preach that the way to be a good Muslim is to be wealthy and industrious. These clerics are part of a new trend of religious leaders who want a conservative religion that can function in harmony with a globalized world.

Tariq Ramadan is part of this trend, too. He says he believes that traditional Shariah needs to be reimagined to accommodate the circumstances of Muslims in the West. Khaled, by contrast, doesn't talk about reforming Shariah. He is more concerned with softening the edges of Islamic tradition that might bump up against the West. He tells men that polygamy should be practiced only in very special cases, and he tells women that they should not cover their entire faces because it makes it too hard to communicate with non-Muslims. It is better for a Muslim in the West to postpone a prayer, he says, than to perform ablutions in a public bathroom, where splashing water up to his knees and elbows would be seen as rude.

In many ways, Ramadan's message is similar to Khaled's, but when I spoke to him earlier this month, as he awaited word of whether the United States government would allow him into the country to speak, he told me that Khaled's approach leaves unanswered specific questions about how coexistence should work. Should

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Muslims start their own schools or go to public schools? How should they treat homosexuals? Can they take out interest-bearing loans, which many Muslims say are forbidden by the Koran?

Olivier Roy and other scholars connect Khaled's popularity with global religious trends. "The people who have an audience right now in Christianity and Islam are not liberals but revivalists and born-again," Roy told me recently. "What is working now with the youth is not liberal religion. We have books about 'Is Islam Able to Reform?' The problem is readership. We invite liberal Muslim reformers to conferences and colloquiums, but they have no large constituency."

Around the same time Khaled was becoming a celebrity in Egypt, his friend Ahmed Abu Haiba was starting his own television production company, with a lofty goal: to create a brand-new style of Islamic TV. Khaled and Abu Haiba, 37, first met at a mosque in 1983; they were teenagers at the time, and as they grew up, they became more religious together. After college, Abu Haiba worked as a producer in the Middle East and Africa for a Japanese news network. He was exposed to a variety of Western media, and as he watched TV signals from around the globe, he started to think about the idea of Islamic entertainment. He says he believed strongly in the totalizing philosophy of Islam held by the Muslim Brotherhood -- that all aspects of life should be infused with Islam. He didn't believe in a television schedule divided into religious shows and nonreligious shows; he thought every show should be religious in its own way. But Islamic TV at the time was boring, he told me when I spoke with him in Cairo in December. Television preachers like Sheikh Muhammad Shaarawi of Egypt, who was popular in the 1980's and 1990's, never tried to be TV stars. In his weekly show, the wizened Shaarawi, who died in 1998, used to address his audience in classical Arabic from atop an ornate thronelike chair in his mosque. The camera would shakily focus on him for most of the talk, occasionally cutting away to shots of old men sitting on carpets on the floor of the mosque. "A person can't listen to a recitation of the Koran for more than hour," Abu Haiba explained to me. When he watched Christian TV programs, by contrast, he admired the way they wove together proselytizing and entertainment with state-of-the-art production values. "I was affected by it," he said. "I felt it fulfilled the vision for what I want from religious programming."

When Abu Haiba talked to Khaled about his notion for a new kind of religious TV program, his friend not only liked the idea, he also volunteered to be the host of the first show. And so in 1999, Abu Haiba and Khaled produced four episodes of a religious talk show called "Words From the Heart." Each episode opened with a slow-motion, soft-focus montage: women praying; Amr Khaled emoting; a beloved Egyptian actress, Soheir el-Babli, who had left the theater to become religious, crying; and young members of a studio audience offering spirited testimonials into a hand-held microphone. Sentimental music played, and the show's logo appeared in puffy Arabic letters inside two hearts. Khaled addressed the camera from behind a silver desk shaped like the Islamic crescent. The studio's backdrop was ultramodern aluminum panels illuminated by purple and blue lights.

For part of the show, Khaled would speak from behind the desk on a topic like patience or modesty. Then audience members would offer relevant stories from their own lives. Each episode also featured interviews with athletes or actresses who were newly religious, along with prerecorded clips of ordinary Muslims describing adverse circumstances or testifying to amazing miracles. Khaled ended each program

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with an emotional, spontaneous, open-ended prayer. Everyone in the audience held his or her hands open, palms facing up, and Khaled would pray, sometimes squealing with emotion, as the audience chanted rhythmically or sobbed. Muslims sometimes offer prayers like this in private or at a family meal or a baby-naming ceremony, but, Abu Haiba told me, no one had ever televised such an intimate, personal prayer before.

Abu Haiba circulated tapes of the episodes to dozens of Egyptian broadcast and satellite TV networks, looking for a buyer, but no one was interested. So he ordered 2,000 copies of the tapes himself and distributed them to Cairo street vendors, who sold them in stalls alongside fuzzy slippers and posters of the pop star Amr Diab or outside mosques, where men lay prayer beads and Korans in zippered leather cases on top of old cars or rugs. The first 2,000 copies sold quickly; so did the next 2,000. When sales hit 50,000, an executive at Dream TV, a satellite network in Egypt, changed his mind about Abu Haiba's offer. He bought the four episodes that were offered to him earlier. (Dream TV has since broadcast them hundreds of times.) Around the same time, Yasmeen al-Khayam, the singer who had invited Khaled to speak at her father's mosque, got in touch with a friend at Iqraa, the satellite channel, and urged him to consider putting Khaled on the air.

Iqraa, which means "Recite," is the pet project of Sheik Salah Kamal, a Saudi who is an owner of the Arab Radio and Television Network, a media conglomerate. He started Iqraa in 1998 to reflect his idea of what a good religious station should broadcast: respected scholars, staid programming, prayer breaks between shows. He didn't plan to make a profit, and the channel didn't draw many viewers. Programs were often political and reflected conservative Wahhabi opinions, condemning idolators and attacking Israel, Jews and Americans.

Nabeel Hammad, the general manager of Iqraa at the time, told me that when he arrived at the channel in 2000, he wanted to make it more competitive and to attract a younger demographic. He said that executives at the channel were divided about Khaled's show, which was mostly devoid of talk of law or politics; some were excited by it, but others felt it wasn't scholarly enough. Hammad decided to take a chance on it, and he said he was shocked by the response when it was broadcast. "All of a sudden, we were getting tons of calls," he told me. "There was a woman in Jordan who said she had a wild teenage son, and lately he had been staying in on Tuesday nights to watch Iqraa. She said she couldn't believe it. She thought Amr Khaled was saving her son's life." Khaled quickly became the biggest thing on Iqraa. Hammad estimates that for a time, about 80 percent of the channel's advertising revenue came from Khaled's shows.

In October 2002, Khaled says, the Egyptian secret service called him to the office of the interior ministry, and a deputy minister told him he had to stop speaking in Egypt. Khaled says that he was warned, "If you talk to even two people, you do not know what will happen." That night, he told me, he decided, based on tips from friends close to the government, that if he didn't leave Egypt right then, he might not be able to later. He flew to Beirut, which became his base for the next two years. He says he headed for the airport with only his gym bag.

Over the following few weeks, his Web site became a clearinghouse for protests over his self-imposed exile. Khaled posted a statement titled "The Real Reasons Behind Amr Khaled's Departure From Egypt" on the site, with a picture of himself

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in a polo shirt and jeans rushing somewhere. Thousands of supporters signed a petition asking the minister of religion to lift the ban on Khaled's preaching.

One night in Khaled's Cairo office, I asked one of his assistants, Amira Hegazy, to tell me what the Arabic statement said. Hegazy, 27, is, like most of Khaled's employees, a former fan; she became so devoted to Khaled that she left her job to work for him. She loaded up the stored Web page on her laptop for me and began reading the statement aloud. Her eyes turned red. Two paragraphs in, tears started streaming down her face. She stopped. "I am sorry," she said. "It was just such an awful time, to think the Thursday lectures and all they brought -- the feeling in the crowd -- would be over. It is like it just happened yesterday. I still miss them so much."

An official in the Egyptian State Information Service, who would agree to speak only on condition of anonymity, disputed Khaled's version of events. According to what this official has heard from people in the government, Khaled was never asked to stop speaking in Egypt. "Khaled represents in Egypt what those evangelical preachers are in the United States, the ones who get people to pledge \$5 million in two hours," the official said. "He represents a new type of preaching in Egypt -- modern and slick. But does he represent a political threat to the state? No."

As the first contemporary Muslim televangelist, Khaled often seems to be making it up as he goes along. His international organization is mostly run by old friends or newly religious men and women in their 20's who left their jobs to be close to him. ("Before he came to work for me, he was crazy," Khaled told me about one of his employees. "Driving his car into the wall! High on drugs!") Khaled gives his phone number to anyone who asks, and he regularly takes calls from complete strangers. During a dinner I attended in the front room of a Turkish restaurant in Germany, Khaled's dining companions, eight wealthy leaders of Germany's Muslim community, all of them men, rolled up their sleeves and dove into platters of kebabs while Khaled chatted, completely engaged, with a teenage girl in Lebanon who had just called him out of the blue. "I am so proud of you!" he shouted into his satellite phone. (One of his colleagues, Mohamed Yehia, told me that during Ramadan, Khaled ran up an \$8,000 phone bill talking to fans until Yehia had Khaled's phone temporarily disabled.)

In the last two years, since arriving in England, Khaled has embarked on two separate but related outreach missions. The first outreach is to Muslims in the Arab world, and for them, the message is: Shape up. In 2004, Khaled began a new program on Iqraa called "Life Makers," more than 50 episodes that ran over a year and a half and consisted of exhortations to his followers in the Middle East especially to form groups and take action to improve the world around them -- to teach illiterate Arabs to read, to fix potholes in the streets, to buy new prayer mats for the local mosque -- to do anything and everything that might help to create an Arab revival. At one point, he told his followers to walk the length of a marathon before the next broadcast. Thousands took him up on the challenge.

The second mission is to Muslims in Europe. For them, Khaled's message is about the importance of coexistence. He tells his followers that if they are soccer fans and they live in England, their home team is Arsenal or Tottenham, not Pakistan; and if they live in France, they are to lobby for the right of their daughters to wear head scarves to school -- but in the meantime to make do with designer

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hats. In 2004, Khaled delivered a lecture in Germany titled "Between Integration and Introversion," and in it he described two categories of Muslims in the West, neither of which, he said, was following the Prophet's path. The first type, he said, "has lived confined within themselves in a completely introverted way." These devout immigrants "bring up their children apart from this sinful society. They stay apart from society in every possible way." The second type has assimilated so thoroughly that they have "dissolved" into materialism or sensuality. Both approaches, Khaled said, are mistaken. The correct path is to integrate, and in a positive way: to learn the language of your new home, to interact with your fellow citizens, to volunteer for the fire department, to live such an upstanding life that the common perception most Europeans share about Muslim immigrants -- "that we came here to live, enjoy the freedom, enjoy the financial aid and support, have children and in the end insult them" -- will be turned on its head, replaced by a new and widespread respect for Islam. (Khaled's coexistence apparently has its limits; in a sermon a few years ago, Khaled said the Koran teaches that many Jews "are the most envious, especially toward Muslims, and they are the keenest in spreading lusts, the seduction of women and the advocacy of various sins.")

Last fall, Khaled was the host of "In the Footsteps of the Beloved," a series that was broadcast on Iqraa every night of Ramadan from a different holy location in Saudi Arabia. For the entire month, Khaled hammered his new message of integration. Nearly every story of Muhammad that Khaled told was used to demonstrate that the Prophet favored coexistence, valued the idea of a Muslim being a full citizen of whatever nation he lived in and opposed having Muslims leave their country to fight battles in other countries. The Prophet, he said, "respected the right of citizenship. . . Muslims living in the West should similarly respect the rights and duties of citizenship."

When government-sponsored satellite stations in Egypt began broadcasting music videos and Middle Eastern versions of "American Idol" and "Big Brother" a few years ago, they provoked popular boycotts, which Khaled enthusiastically endorsed. But Khaled also makes it clear that music and movies are not always haram, or "forbidden," as many conservative Muslims believe. They are permissible, Khaled says, as long as they aren't about sex or another inappropriate subject. Khaled gave an early boost to the career of Sami Yusuf, the religious British-born Muslim singer whose songs are played over loudspeakers before most of Khaled's events. Yusuf's is the prototype for a fledgling genre of popular Islamic entertainment. His latest CD, "My Ummah," comes in both a "music version," with full instrumentation, and an edition with only traditional percussion instruments, for more religious listeners. On one song, "Free," Yusuf sings about the hypocrisy of European countries that preach freedom and democracy and yet bar Muslim girls from wearing the hijab to school:

"Why can't I just be me?" she says

Time and time again

You speak of democracy

Yet you rob me of my liberty

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All I want is equality

Why can't you just let me be free?

Yusuf's success has given other young musicians the idea that working with Khaled might be a ticket to fame. One day when I was at Khaled's Cairo office, an underground Egyptian rapper named Raquib al-Nacina arrived wearing an Enyce jersey and nervously clutching a small portable hard drive containing three songs he had written. Nacina told me that he thought if Khaled would just put his demos up on his Web site for a few weeks, he'd get a record deal, just as Yusuf had. Nacina admired Khaled's style. "I am not so religious myself," he said. "I pray, but I go to parties." Still, he said, "I really like Khaled's attitude."

In Mansoura, Egypt, Khaled's Life Makers have set up a "cultural committee," headed by a young man named Ahmed Emara, who until last year produced secular music videos for Egyptian stations like Nile Variety, the kind Khaled preaches against. Watching Khaled's TV show persuaded Emara to leave his job, and he now recruits pop stars to record professional-quality religious songs for Khaled's shows. A rap song for an anti-obesity campaign was a big hit, but some Life Makers I spoke to thought a techno song Emara arranged for the Life Makers' antismoking campaign was inappropriate because the fast tempo suggested dancing, which is forbidden.

The idea of Islamic entertainment, which Abu Haiba and Khaled first started talking about in the late 1990's, has developed its own momentum. In last year's Egyptian elections, Abu Haiba did media consulting for a Muslim Brotherhood candidate, urging him to emphasize a message beyond ideology, one that also had entertainment value. And this year, Abu Haiba helped start up an entire satellite network, Al-Resalah, or "the Message," that conforms to his dream of television that is infused with Islam; the network will create Islamic facsimiles of reality shows, soap operas and music videos.

In December, I went with Khaled to Leverkusen, Germany, where he was the keynote speaker at a conference organized by the Islamic Community in Germany, an organization affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Five thousand Muslims gathered in a slightly rundown soccer stadium, mostly from Germany but some from other parts of Europe, to hear Khaled speak on "Working Together for a Better Future: Muslim Women's Empowerment." The day after the lecture, Khaled met in the V.I.P. room of the stadium with about 40 young people from Life Makers groups in Berlin, Frankfurt, Cologne and other German cities. They were excited about meeting Khaled in person; when he arrived, many of them snapped his photo with their cellphone cameras. There were more women than men, and all of the women wore hijabs.

The meeting was part of Khaled's campaign toward a more integrated Muslim population in Europe, and it gave me a sense of some of the obstacles in his way. "Many of you were born here," he said. He spoke in Arabic, and a German woman translated intermittently. "Your parents came here a long time ago, and they had other priorities. That is fine, but your priority is to make sure we are a part of this society. We need for other people to see we are not selfish -- that we don't just come to the West to take and not participate. And there cannot be a renaissance in the Arab world without coexistence. Development can't happen

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without transfer of know-how and technology."

Khaled said he hoped that the German Life Makers would present him with projects that reflected this idea of working together with the West. He introduced a representative from Life Makers Tunisia who had flown in just for this meeting. The Tunisian Life Makers group was significant, Khaled said, because it includes non-Muslims who work with Muslims on charitable projects. (There are Christians and Jews in the group.)

The German Life Makers seemed startled by this idea, and Khaled could tell. "I know people are wondering about it," he said gently. "I know some people may not like it, but it's worth it to talk about it."

When Khaled opened the floor for questions, it was clear that there was a gap between his agenda and that of the Life Makers around the table. Though Khaled says that Arab immigrants in Germany should learn German, one attendee proposed that German Life Makers should teach Arabic to other Muslim immigrants. "It is a big problem that Muslims here in Germany who don't speak Arabic can't understand what is said in the mosque," she said. Another woman said she was already teaching Arabic to Muslims, but she had heard that it was inappropriate to offer such lessons without also teaching the Koran.

Khaled began to spin his wheels a bit. "I am wondering if there are any ideas about integration to benefit us and serve our goal in some way," he said. "Is anyone working on projects supported by city councils, cooperating with different groups? One example of this is the World Cup; the idea is not to play football but to bring people together from all over the world." Khaled picked up speed: "If God wanted, he could have created all mankind as one religion. He created many different ways so we will cooperate."

Chaimaa Mousa, a 28-year-old mother from Cologne wearing a mauve hijab, floor-length robe and white high heels, raised her hand. She said she wasn't comfortable with Khaled's theme. "There is danger in this point you are making about working with the other," she said. "Before you deal with the non-Muslims, you have to make some rules." There were nods around the room. To Mousa, the real concern was that assimilation could lead Muslims to neglect or compromise their religious observances. "I am afraid if we work together we might dispense with some of our important values," she said. "What can we do not to do so?"

Khaled said he agreed with Mousa that it was important to set boundaries, but he said it was also possible to be flexible on some issues that made integration easier. For instance, Khaled said, he had decided to shake hands with Western women, a decision he acknowledged might not be right for everyone. Khaled quoted a hadith, a commentary on a Koranic verse, that he said showed that a Muslim who works with non-Muslims and is patient with their bad attributes is better than a Muslim who isolates herself.

After the session, I spoke with Mousa. "I was born here," she explained, "and I have seen many girls and boys who live here, and they see it as normal to live one way with Muslims and another with non-Muslims -- maybe they do all five prayers only at night, or they will sit with non-Muslims when they drink at bars." She said she found Khaled's new message about integration refreshing and challenging,

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but she worried that he wasn't emphasizing the importance of being a better Muslim first, before engaging with the outside world. "He is saying, 'Go meet the other,' when some Muslims in Germany don't even know how to pray correctly."

As Khaled was driven away from the Life Makers meeting in a Mercedes, he leaned his head against a hanging bag of new tailored suits he picked up earlier in Frankfurt to replace the ones he lost in Saudi Arabia. "Do you think they understood what I was saying?" he asked me. He said he didn't think they did. "A project about teaching Arabic to Muslims -- this isn't integration," Khaled said quietly. "They accept my message, but they haven't internalized it."

In the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, the Madrid train bombings, the London tube bombings and the cartoon riots, many European governments and philanthropic groups have been looking for a point of communication with Muslims, and a few are beginning to come to the conclusion that they have found it in Amr Khaled.

In 2005, The Sunday Times of London leaked a 100-page memo, code-named Operation Contest, that was compiled by the British government as a plan to combat domestic Islamic extremism. The memo suggested setting up Muslim-friendly workplaces, taking a more aggressive line against radical imams and promoting the work of those whose messages were more palatable. The memo named Khaled as one of the Muslim leaders the government should support. This year, the Foreign Office of the British government has financed a series of religious lectures being held around the country aimed at combating extremism among young British Muslims. Khaled has been invited to speak.

Khaled has also attracted the attention of a number of multinational corporations that have financed individual conferences and projects his nonprofit organization has set up. Rick Little, a devout Christian, runs a foundation based in Maryland called the ImagineNations Group, which works with the World Bank and philanthropic organizations to promote entrepreneurship in the Middle East. Little learned about Khaled recently and has helped arrange financing for some of his projects, and later this year, Little says, he hopes to introduce Khaled to a wider audience of potential benefactors when Khaled makes his first trip to the United States.

A State Department official who agreed to speak only on condition of anonymity told me that he hoped someone within the department would be able to meet with Khaled when he came to the United States. Khaled's message, he said, is "very much in sync with what we want to say to the Muslim world, which is that we have no problem with Islam and no problem with conservative Islam. We have a problem with criminality called terrorism."

When the controversy erupted in February over cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper, Khaled found it more difficult than usual to find a place to stand between the West and the Muslim world. He delivered dozens of lectures on the topic on Iqraa, at first merely condemning the cartoons and the violence that accompanied some protests. Later he urged conversation with the West, in addition to boycotts and protests. Khaled asked his young fans to send letters to his Web site explaining Islam, which he would then forward to Danish young people. He organized a conference in Copenhagen to bring together young Muslims and young Christian Danes to discuss Islam, press freedom and religious tolerance.

Khaled's televised lectures on the topic became longer, more involved and more personal in the days leading up to the conference. He told his viewers that Muslims living in Europe could be forcibly removed from Europe, or even slaughtered. "You might think I am exaggerating," he said. But he reminded his viewers about the Spanish Inquisition. "Have you forgotten what happened to us after 800 years in Spain? We were kicked out, and Muslims were burned. A great number were killed or tortured. . . . Not just that, many of them were forced into Christianity once more."

On the same program, Khaled said he wanted to give "eyewitness" testimony to what life was really like in Europe for Muslims. Khaled told dozens of stories of situations he had encountered in Europe. He told a story about his wife, who rode the bus in her hijab on the day of last summer's bombings in London. Other passengers, Khaled said, wanted to search her, but she refused, and the bus driver wouldn't move the bus. Eventually she got off the bus, crying, and an Englishwoman followed her out of the bus and said to her, "Forgive us, but we are afraid and we do not want to die." He described how his son's school sent the family a card for a Muslim holiday. He told a story about a Muslim man who was caught on camera ripping the seats of the Underground with a knife and another about an Englishman who had converted to Islam when he saw his Muslim friend pick up someone else's litter.

Khaled received the endorsements of some Egyptian and Saudi clerics in organizing the conference in Denmark, but he was also condemned harshly by a number of imams, newspaper columnists and, most significant, by Sheik Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the Al Jazeera preacher and head of the International Union for Muslim Scholars, one of the most influential mainstream voices of Islam. Qaradawi criticized Khaled's calls for dialogue, and Al Jazeera broadcast Qaradawi's criticism over and over again. Qaradawi said that there should be no dialogue unless Denmark issued a formal apology.

The controversy about Khaled's conference continued for weeks after it took place. Egyptian Islamists who had formerly praised Khaled in the press now criticized him. Fahmi Howeidy, a prominent columnist for the Arab daily Asharq al-Awsat, said Khaled was weakening the position of the Islamic world by going to Denmark. But Khaled was convinced that he was doing the right thing. When I spoke to him by phone earlier this month, he told me that the controversy over the cartoons was just the beginning. "It is a practical test for Arab countries: a clash between my ideology of dialogue and the ideology of a clash of civilizations," he said. "This is one of many events that will make this point over time."

It became clear to me in the time I spent with Khaled that he sees himself as much more than a motivational speaker in the tradition of Dr. Phil. In one conversation, he compared himself to world leaders who had been persecuted or had met tragic ends. "If you follow the end of life of most reforming people -- Kennedy, Gandhi, most of the prophets, Nelson Mandela -- you find the end is not sweet," he said. "I think we are going in the same way."

I was surprised that Khaled thought he might suffer for his work. The Arab world has its share of dissidents and intellectuals who must travel with police protection; Khaled hardly seemed in that league. He was a devout Muslim who never strayed from conservative interpretations of the religion. He didn't challenge any

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tenets of mainstream Islam or any Middle Eastern government. But Khaled seemed certain that trying to hold the middle ground would grow only more treacherous.

Photos: Getting His Word Out: It wasn't until sales of Khaled's first tapes, sold by street vendors, hit 50,000 that an Egyptian TV network took notice.

(Photographs by Olaf Blecker for The New York Times); Islam With a Twist: On the satellite channel Iqraa, Khaled preaches a religious conservatism in touch with the modern world. (Stills from Iqraa TV)

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EDITION: Late Edition - Final

Word Count: 9822

4/30/06 NYT 646

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